

Miner Fall, Major Lift...A Column by Richard Kerns

Written by Richard Kerns

Thursday, 23 October 2008 02:07 - Last Updated Thursday, 23 October 2008 17:48

Repeat after me ... Funicular

Beauty arrived unexpectedly tonight, so that I couldn't deny it, had to write it. For it was beauty wrapped in word, the kind you close your eyes and open your heart to, let it wash all over you. Cleansing, restorative. Beauty of the soul not only warming the wearer, but gifting others of life touch.



Have to admit I was lubed for the experience, of wine and spirit.

Had just checked out Jeff Davis' pictures on Applndie, and soaked up the view of the mountains he and I call home; among the hallowed hills and still hollows of the Savage River basin, where Big Savage and Backbone mountains collide in a jumble of fold and rise, my bottomland cabin, his hilltop abode. Kindred of sacred place, we bow to the same cathedrals.

Like when Jeff told me he'd seen bald eagles while paddling Savage River Reservoir, not off on distant ridgeline, but up close among the branches and boughs reflecting in the water. They were out fishing.

Hopefully, though, the eagles didn't catch more than the one-per-year bag limit recommended for pregnant women and precariously-numbered national symbols, as a result of the mercury content of the otherwise pristine waters. For shame, the plague of acid rain claiming a body of water so close to home and heart.

I still haven't seen the eagles, probably because I always haul in to shore after four beers or so, to avoid trouble with The Man. I'm convinced that the eagles, being discerning as they are majestic, figure one isn't worth buzzing if one isn't himself buzzed. Eagles generally only reveal themselves to spirit and life, of the sort that can chug a 12 pack and still paddle. Or at least turn the switch on the electric motor.

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Jeff's tree shots on Applndie are explosions of fall, images crisp as the blue skies that frame them. Photographs are just so sweet on the Web, as compared to newsprint, and Steve, Woody and Ben, the Applndie tech guys, are working to get us click-on enlarge so we can really celebrate the world around us.

Which is what Jeff did with his photos. As nice as his tree shots were, though, I was drawn to the one he posted of the mountains in fall, what I guess to be early-morning mist flowing like a soft river through deep ravines, and in the foreground, leaves aglow in the white light of sun's first rays, orange, yellow and red, a final grand dance at ball's end.

So after checking out Applndie and Jeff's latest I got into my Applndie email, which, virginal as it is, remains free of Viagra ads, chain letters and Nigerian scams. However, I am on a couple community email shares, a lively current coursing Frostburg of which I was completely unaware. A party line of the fine folks who make this fine town tick.

First up on the MainStreet First bulletin was Andrea DePaltis, whom I have never met, but whose name I recognize discretely attached to a number of cool, community things, from the Westernport Library renovation, to the vision of village green and parking place at Mechanic and Water.

She sent out an email telling folks about two little old ladies from England who stopped in her shop and reported themselves and others utterly intimidated and nearly done in by Depot Hill, as anyone who's ever been upon it can attest. The ladies' visit only affirms what everyone already knows about that train, but for Andrea it was a reminder of a problem unresolved. She did some digging and found that county tourism can have a bus at the train for \$40 per trip. Not waiting to make a group appeal, Andrea forked out the money for the ride on her own, with the Scenic Railroad twice announcing her sponsorship of the trolley, at the beginning and end of the Frostburg run. Folks stopped in at Spectrum Design just to say thanks.

Andrea put out the word and challenged other businesses to step up and sponsor buses for a day. The response, by way of the party line, is altogether positive.

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I admire Andrea's willingness to make the appeal, but she shouldn't have had to make it in the first place..



The private sector is often called on to help lend a public hand, and it is to my knowledge very generous in meeting such appeals. However, businesses should not be made to fund the transport of tourists. It's that simple. Especially with the hundreds of thousands generated by the hotel/motel tax, revenue should be available for such a critical service. No reason the county can't partner with the city to make it happen, and vice versa.

Still, a bus is a band-aid, and ugly at that. Shuttles are suited for longer rides, like Tattoo on Fantasy Island, not a quick-on/quick-off up the hill.

Frostburg needs a funicular, and if you don't know what that is, quick, check out Wikipedia by that name, you have a minute or two, as I'm gonna rant about something only tangentially related.

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Back in my other print life, I occasionally lamented the denial of Mountain Maryland its own license plate, akin to the Chesapeake Bay. It's a habit I plan to bring to Applndie. For ignorance, a closing of the eyes to reality, is injurious not only to Western Maryland, but to the Republic itself, as we have lately seen. As surely as Sideling Hill announces the Alleghenies, we deserve a plate of our own, we of the Free State who are of the mountains, their history, their ancient mystery so momentarily if accidentally exposed at a roadway gap that paints the eons in great, earthy arcs.

We deserve our own plate, then as now, as we will until a politician with some 'nads grabs it and makes it a cause. Not to claim that we are apart, but to declare that we are a part as unique and worthy of celebration, as the Bay itself.

And we'd give all the revenue to the Bay Trust, to demonstrate our commitment to the spirit of One Maryland, and to buy off the Trust, which is naturally reluctant to dilute its elegant, signature brand.

So that'll be a theme from time to time. Another, I decided upon reading Andrea's email, is to resurrect and promote the idea of an incline, from the tunnel opening jut beyond the turntable, straight up, or pretty close to it, to that empty lot beyond the privacy fence, the lift emerging beside Lucky's Liquors, effortlessly unto Main. Look up funicular and you'll find they're everywhere, and not by any means something of yore that isn't built any more. It needs to be demonstrated anew why Frostburg and Allegany County cannot work with the state to secure funding for a Depot Incline. Attraction upon attraction, like mountain on mountain to every horizon, to history and wonder anew. In downtown Frostburg.

But ya gotta get there.

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